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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001658

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PNAT](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SADR CITY DAC MEMBER ON RECONSTRUCTION; DAC ROLE

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Sadr City District Advisory Council (DAC) and Baghdad City Council member Khudair al-Lami told PolOff on May 15 that Sadr City residents would give Coalition Forces (CF) credit for reconstructing their area if large, visible structures were built. It is difficult to notice sewer and waters lines, he said, and so many Sadr City residents are losing patience with CF. To better coordinate such reconstruction projects, al-Lami said the DAC should be an independent local government, rather than a strictly advisory body. This would allow the DAC to better serve the people of Sadr City, he said. He argued that effective local government is needed to maintain the rule of law and eliminate militia influence in Sadr City. End Summary

"Look What the British Gave Us!"

¶2. (C) In a May 15 meeting with PolOff, Khudair al-Lami, member of the Sadr City DAC and Baghdad City Council, urged CF to build large, visible structures. He said that, because it is difficult to notice new sewer and water lines, average Iraqis do not recognize CF reconstruction efforts. As a result, he said, many people in Sadr City are losing patience with CF promises to rebuild the area. Al-Lami said large structures such as the ones the UK built when they ruled Iraq will serve as a visible reminder of how CF helped the Iraqi people. (Comment: We hear comments about creating visual reminders of aid from other Iraqis. In fact, much of Sadr City was covered in sewage in late 2004. Now, the water infrastructure and sewerage in Sadr City is better now due to US efforts. End Comment.)

Back To the DAC

¶3. (C) Al-Lami expects SCIRI, Fadhila, and the Sadrist to win the majority of seats on the Sadr City DAC in the upcoming provincial elections. He said he hopes that, after the elections, the DAC can become a true local government, rather than remain a strictly advisory body. The DAC, he argued, should be able to levy taxes on the people of Sadr City and use this money to carry out projects. Having an independent budget, he argued, is essential for the DAC to maintain its independence as a governing body and better serve Sadr City residents.

JAM: What Weak Government Hath Wrought

14. (C) Al-Lami argued that strong local government is essential to maintaining the rule of law. In the absence of government control, Al-Lami stated, the Sadrism-backed Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) has taken control of Sadr City. During the Saddam era, al-Lami claimed, over 7,000 Iraqi Police (IP) officers patrolled Sadr City. Now, there are only 1,200. Calling Sadr City the "Heart of Baghdad," Al-Lami said that the lack of IP control over Sadr City threatens to destabilize the whole capital. PolOff replied that CF continuously trains new Iraqi Police officers and soldiers, and the 6th Iraqi Army Division has assumed battle space in Sadr City.

Comment

15. (C) Al-Lami's comments seem to show a willingness on the part of Sadr City politicians to take charge of security in their area. While it may be true that the GOI has yet to provide adequate security in Sadr City, we have not seen much evidence of Sadr politicians or citizens taking measures to advance their own security. Iraqis do not seem to understand that communities are also responsible for their own stability. We welcome DAC members' interest in filling the void, as long as it is done legally. Al-Lami's statements on reconstruction echo those of other embassy contacts: reconstruction is something many Iraqis do not see, and so many assume that it is not happening. The primary reason why CF and others have spent reconstruction funds on water and sewage is because those are the needs identified by Iraqis and CF as priorities. CF and others have tended to keep reconstruction projects low-profile to ensure the security of the project staff and the project

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itself. However, constructing large buildings that are readily apparent to Iraqis, while not necessarily serving the immediate needs of the people, would apparently score public relations points with some Iraqis.
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